Castlemaine Naturalist

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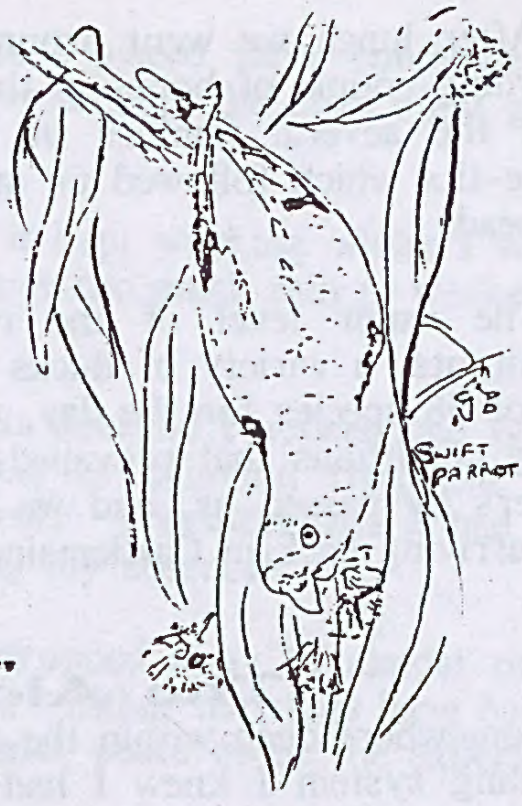

"We are a Weird Mob"

On Sunday May 24 the Melbourne branch of the Bird Observers Club of Australia held an excursion to the Newstead/Maldon area under the leadership of Colin Barraclough. Maggie Oliver was to lead from this end, but, after all her hard work and organising, she had an unfortunate accident and was unable to make the trip on the day. We hope you are back to your best again by now Maggie.

Nine cars departed Castlemaine at 10.30am in grey, bleak, overcast and drizzling conditions in search of Regent Honeyeaters, Swift Parrots and any other feathered friends that we might be able to find in adverse conditions.

Our first stop at Gower School did not produce much in numbers or variety, but "the Quince Tree" rewarded us with Golden Whistler, Grey Fantail and Brown Tree Creeper. Conditions did not improve much on the trip through the forest to Newstead, Jacky Winter and Wedge-tailed Eagle being the main additions to the list.

The Trip to Tullaroop Res. across the Moolort Plains provided some raptors, with Brown Falcons (several), Whistling Kite and Nankeen Kestrel being added to the list.

Our lunch stop was the picnic area at Tullaroop Res. and it was "alive" with birds. The rain was still holding off as we "dined and watched". There were lorrikeets by the hundreds, mainly Purple-crowned, but also Little and Musk. Diamond and Red-browed Firetails were on display along with Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Red-rumped Parrots, Goldfinches and New Holland Honeyeaters.

After lunch we went around to the back of the res. and spent a rewarding couple of hours in the bush with some of the main sightings being the several families of White-browed Babblers, three Crested Shrike-tits which followed us around, Yellow Robins and more raptors overhead.

The water level of the res. is still very low, but we found cormorants, a variety of ducks and grebes, and dotterels to give us a tally of 58 species for the day, which was quite pleasing considering the wintry conditions that prevailed. We were very fortunate that the rain showers by-passed us, and we all had a very enjoyable, though chilly day, arriving back in Castlemaine about 4.30pm.

Ken Dredge.

The Alcoholic Slug

Somewhere deep within the recesses of my mind and even deeper in my filing system I knew I had information about trapping slugs with stale beer. I had it filed in my head along with companion planting - it sounded like a good idea but it probably wouldn't work. However, as I had noticed my new Ajuga australis (the only one which germinated last spring) was being steadily demolished, I decided strong action was required.

I had previously operated by the torch-and-trample method - with mild success - but unfortunately the slugs didn't retire each night when I did, and they had free rein when I wasn't in residence. So, one night I decided, though not being a beer drinker, to test the theory.

Before retiring I placed two lids from the largest size Nescafe jars in the garden and filled them with beer (brand name witheld!). What surprised me was not only the extent of the catch, but that at 9 o'clock next morning slugs were still injudiciously approaching the containers.

For the best part of an hour I watched a little drama being enacted. The players were nine slugs of varying sizes. Some approached the container confidently, rapidly and purposely. Others (mostly the small ones) were slower, but like the cat, were filled with curiosity. All but one drank the beer and finally fell in. The other drank and wisely - if too late - departed. It travelled rather unsteadily away from the container, but later made a wide u-turn and whilst heading back to the container disappeared under leaf litter, presumably to nurse its hangover or to contemplate the 12 steps to sobriety.

With the overnight catch of 40 slugs came the problem of disposal. So as not to risk raising a generation of alcoholic birds I decided the safest method was disposal by composting.

Flushed by the first night's success I placed three containers the next night for a catch of 86 slugs. Five containers the third night gained a catch of 136.

The value of this method was that it kept working whilst I was in Melbourne - provided that it there was not too much rain to weaken the beer.

On my return to Castlemaine the next weekend I noticed one White-winged Chough had developed the habit of drinking from the beer containers in preference to the water bowls. I suspect that it had been living on a diet of marinated slugs during my absence!

Within a week the slug catch had dropped away to almost nil. I have not experienced a slug problem since. Either the slugs have become alerted to my technique and moved to safer pastures or the experiment has proved a great success.

Natalie de Maccus

Highlights of a Tassie Trip

I thought that this time I would share with you just a few of the delightful sights and events that we enjoyed on our trip to Tasmania during April.

Things like -

*Watching Shy Albatrosses, Short-tailed Shearwaters, Australian Gannets and prions from the Incat Ferry in Bass Strait.

*Getting up at sunrise on our first morning. We'd stayed overnight at Beauty Point, and I wandered across the other side of the road to the beach on the estuary of the Tamar River. Pied Oyster-catchers and Masked Lapwings were silhouetted against the pearly water and fishing boats were moored on the other side of the river in the mist. By the time I'd finished my walk I had already seen Yellow-throated Honeyeaters and Forest Ravens. I'd listened to raucous calls which I finally realised belonged to the Yellow Wattlebirds, and spotted a white tail tip belonging to a Ringtail Possum asleep in the mouth of a tree hollow.

*At Asbestos Range N.P.- five Brown Quail at the entrance, numerous Superb Blue Fairy-wrens, several Tasmanian Native Hens, Pademelons and a Bennett's Wallaby at the picnic area, and Forktailed Swifts over the shrubs at the side of the road.

* In Devonport we were escorted by a kindly local lady on her daily walk around a less developed part of the walking track that we'd been following and shown some lovely nooks where there were numerous birds, including Strong-billed Honeyeaters and Dusky Robins. She even took us home and gave us a cuppa before we walked back the 3 or 4 kms back to the car!

* We visited the Arboretum near Devonport and enjoyed walking around some of the tracks, admiring beautiful trees, including one magnificent White Gum (Manna Gum, E.viminalus), shrubs and ferns. I particularly was facinated by the different Nothofagus species in the Gondawana section, some of which were planted by Stan Bruton. One of the paths we took through the native forest, which has been left on the property is there also thanks to Stan. We saw our first Tasmanian Thornbills of the trip at the Arboretum, and got our first good look at the Green Rosellas. The most numerous of all the bird species we saw there were the Blue Wrens.

* Before the rain, the forest was dry at our friend's place up on the range at Upper Stowport above Burnie, and I didn't expect to see much, though there were dozens of wrens around the house. Next day I saw a Brown Bandicoot and a Pademelon, but the wrens, a couple of Golden Whistlers, Grey Shrike-thrushes and numerous Grey Fantails plus Blackbirds, completed the bird list. A fortnight later, after there had been a couple of inches of rain, I found Bassian Thrushes, Beautiful Firetails, New Holland Honeyeaters, Dusky Robins, Pink Robins, Brown and Tasmanian Thornbills, and Yellow-throated Honeyeaters as well as the others seen earlier, though there were fewer Wrens in the houseyard.

* A day in the Mount Field N.P. added ferns, fungi and tall trees to our experiences, as well as a male Pink Robin sitting on a branch at the side of the road as we walked back to the car park after walking the Russell Falls/Tall Trees circuit. We saw the Scrub Tits there, too.

Intending to return to our accomodation along the north side of the river we turned too early, at Westaway, and found ourselves in Hamilton after a beautiful drive up the valley and over a range of hills. Clearest memory of that drive is rows of Lombardi Poplars in autumn gold along the sides of the roads.

* Our most memorable stay was at Inala on Bruny Island. The cackling of the Tasmanian Native Hens was often a background to whatever we were doing. Soon after we arrived Doug videoed an argument between two flocks when one encroached on the other's territory. Tonia told us this was a regular occurance. The din was unbelievable! There was a female Pink Robin at the house, as well as Dusky and Scarlet Robins, Strong-billed and New Holland Honeyeaters, Green Rosellas, and of course, the Forty-spotted Pardalotes.

A walk around the property was a real delight. I'd remembered enough from my walk with Tonia 2½ years ago, and the paths are kept cleared, that I could confidently explore without worrying about getting lost! With the odd season down there too, I found Grass Trigger plants and an Aotus in flower. Several plants of Hibbertia procumbens were in flower, as was Common Heath. This was mainly at the boronia patch where there are acres of Boronia megastigma planted.

Later that day we drove down to Cloudy Bay, only 5 or 6 minutes away, and were stopped on the road by a flock of Green Rosellas which

weren't interested in moving - until we tried to video and photgraph them. When we walked down on the beach there were at least 6 Hooded Plovers running backwards and forwards feeding on the beach. Doug got some quite decent video of them. That night the big, old, black Brushtail Possum visited for the first time.

* The picture in my head of Bicheno, our next stop over, is hills, islands and beaches of granite boulders all with a background of forested mountains. We walked along the foreshore walking track after climbing one of the small granite hills, and watched crabs scuttling under ledges, and Chitons, Sea Squirts, purple sponges, Sea Lettuce and anemones covering the rocks where the sea washed over them.

* Before we left Bicheno to head back to Devonport and the Ferry again we drove to St Helens in the rain, and decided to return via St Marys. We didn't know about St Mary's Pass, or that St Mary's Pass is not a good place to be when it's raining, but apart from water running all over the road, and stones coming down from above, we didn't encounter any landslides which we were told , afterwards, can occur there during heavy rain!

Another visit to our friend at Stowport, via the beautiful Scenic Road from Ulverstone via Penguin (again), and a walk in the now refreshed forest on the property concluded a most enjoyable holiday.

Rita Mills

Observations

* From Maureen and Ken Dredge comes this intriguing observation - "Whilst walking through Muckleford Forest observing two juvenile or female Hooded Robins flitting in front of us we were "attacked" from behind by a brightly coloured male! He passed over our heads by a metre of two with a snapping of his bill before herding the other two deeper into the bush."

* George Broadway was apple picking in an orchard in Harcourt when he looked down to find a Flame Robin on the rung of the ladder.

* John Turnbull reported seeing two foxes running with the local Kangaroos. The Magpie population in the back yard has settled to 8 birds since Marjory's death. Another outcome seems to be that there are lots of other birds back - ravens and Eastern Spinebills among them and the orphaned Magpie is becoming quite tame.

* Kerry Mewett found dozens of Wood Moths in the area after the first rain.

* Chris Morris reported flocks of Goldfinches near Kyneton at the begining of May. On 28/5 about 5pm there was a flock of about 300 Long Billed Corellas flying overhead at Little Bendigo. There didn't appear to be any Galahs or Sulphur-crested Cockatoos with them, but

* at Margaret Badminton's, at Yapeen, there was a mixed flock of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Long-Billed Corellas and a few Galahs feeding.

* Geoff Harris told of a flock of 10 Indian Mynahs at their place at Barkers Creek.
* Natalie Harris told of a gecko which comes out and hunts moths at the kitchen window. She also reported seeing six Brolgas between Ararat and Dunkeld in April. She brought a specimen from their property of a eucalypt which was identified as White Box, which is fairly uncommon in this district.
* At North Castlemaine the battle goes on as every now and then the Mynahs appear and try to take over the Galah nesting hollows. The second nest has been improved over the past weeks and the pair of Galahs are being very affectionate, cuddling together and preening each other. Rita Mills.
* Maggie Oliver came across a baby Blue-tongued Lizard when she was shifting a rock in the garden.
* On 30/5 at 9am a low flying Little Falcon shot across the road in front of the car near the corner of Hargreaves and Hunter Streets and into the trees behind one of the houses. Rita Mills

PLEASE! I would very much appreciate a written note/ summary regarding your observations as I cannot always catch what has been said. General feedback tells me that this is a popular segment of the newsletter, so if it interested you it will interest someone else too. Ed.

Water—

the whole dam catastrophy!

Water is found about us in many shapes and sizes - reservoirs, irrigation channels, rivers, streams, wetlands, sewerage works - but one thing is certain, there is not enough of it in the right place and what there is is all too often of an uncertain quality.

Water quality and quantity is going to be the important issue of the new millenium. It is estimated that by the year 2025 water will be a limiting resource right across the globe, with demand rising at twice the rate of population growth. To bring it home; while India has 20% of the world's people it has only 4% of the world's fresh water. Under such circumstances war over water is a prospect that haunts the 21st century.

We may not be able to solve all this in Castlemaine but we can think globally while acting locally. For instance, Australia is obliged, as a signatory to the Ramsar Convention, to halt the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve through "wise use" and good management the wetlands that remain. By defination these are shallow, open waters such as lakes, rivers, marshes, swamps, flood plains and coastal fringes - permanaent or temporatry, natural or artificial, freshwater or salt, static or flowing. When I raised the subject with VicParks as the appropriate authority the only response was, "What wetlands do you have in Mount

Alexander Shire?" Apparantly the Expedition Pass disused reservoir, Bells Swamp, local creeks and granite wetlands don't rank.

Management of water resources by State and Local government, assuming some Federal funding, leaves a whole lot to be desired if problems of erosion, acidity salinity and pollution are to be overcome.

Open cut mining plus doze-and-detect exploration is a threat to the ecosystem. Birds in their thousands have died as a result of coming into contact with compounds of cyanide and copper at tailings dams.

ChrisMorris(to be continued)

"NEW" MEMBERS - Welcome back to the club Geoff and Geraldine Harris.

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING -

THE ELTHAM COPPER BUTTERFLY PROJECT Chris Morris, who is in charge of the project, reported to the business meeting that for 5 days during May 11 TAFE Environmental students from Bendigo worked pulling thousands of weeds and brushcutting the thickets of Cape Broom that are intruding on the butterfly area of the Botanical Gardens. Later in the year the new shoots will have to be destroyed. The club has been given a Government grant to cover the expenses, which includes equipment hire, to carry out this work.

The Club will still need to carry out another Broom Pull in September, as hundreds of seedlings are appearing after the rain.

NATIONAL HERITAGE REGISTER Did you know that the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens including the Eltham Copper Butterfly area, the Bendigo water channel from Malmsbury and Faraday School have been placed on the National Heritage Register.

CLUB PUBLICITY It has been suggested that the club program be enlarged and put on the public noticeboards at Maldon, Newstead and Fryerstown, and articles sent to the Castlemaine Mail, Newstead Echo and Maldon Times.

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GREAT DIVIDING TRAIL PUBLIC WALKS

Sun 21 June, 9am, from Wombat Station to Lake St George, Creswick. Duration, approx 7 - 8 hrs. Meet at Old Wombat Station via Rocklyn. The walk is rated easy-medium. Leader Richard Piesse.

If you wish to take part you MUST contact Richard on 9888 8649 at least 4 days before the walk. Suitable clothing and footwear must be worn and food and drinks for the day carried.

As a Club the Field Naturalists are members, but there is a small charge for advertised walks to help with maintenance of the trail, etc.

C.F.N.C. PROGRAMME

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street.

Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days.

Business Meetings are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

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Fri June 12 **Terrick-Terrick; flora, grasslands and the Plains Wanderer** Speaker Shirley Diez, Flora Planner for DRNE. 8pm UCA hall.

Sat June 13. **Firth Park, Trentham East.** Leave 27 Doveton St. 11am. Take lunch and afternoon tea. Leader is G. Broadway.

Fri July 10 **Walking in the Newstead area** Speaker is Ron Sneps who has been conducting these walks. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat July 11 **Nuggety Range, looking for Peach Heath.** Leave 13 Mostyn St at 1.30pm.

Fri Aug. 14 **Volcanos.** Speaker is Dr Julian Hicks. 8pm UCA hall.

Sat Aug 15 **Trentham, to the Geology Museum.** Leave 13 Mostyn St at 1.30pm.

Sat, Sun, Aug 8 and 9 **Swift Parrot Survey** Details to be announced.

Fri 11 to Sun. 13 Sept. **Field Naturalists Get-together at Castlemaine.** For details see CN #244 p7. A flyer will be available in the July CN.

Fri. 16 to Sun 18 Oct. **V.F.N.C.A. Campout at Warnambool.** For details see CN #244 p7.

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Committee; G. Broadway (Pres.), M. Dredge (V.P.), B. Maund (Sec.), M. Badminton (Treas.), R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), John Turnbull, M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner, E. Perkins.

Subscriptions - Ordinary membership: Single $16, Family $24
Pensioner/student: Single $12, Family $18 Supporting : $25
Newsletter posted: Membership + $6.

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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